

Applicant Name Broadwater Conservation District
Project Name Whites Gulch Reclamation – Fish Barrier

Project Abstract

In 1995, the Broadwater Conservation District, in cooperation with Trout Unlimited, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (DFWP), and the Helena National Forest, conducted a placer mine reclamation project in Whites Gulch in the Big Belt Mountains utilizing funds from the Reclamation and Development Grants Program (RDGP). The project included reclamation of nearly 3,000 feet of stream and reshaping of almost 17 acres of placer-mined floodplain. A portion of the project also included installation of a fish barrier, as prereclamation site conditions had isolated a small population of pure strain native westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) in an old diversion ditch. While the ditch separated the sparse population from non-native brook trout, it also was unstable and actively eroding before the reclamation effort. Since 1995, the reclamation project area has provided suitable habitat and the WCT population is thriving. The Whites Gulch population is doing well enough that surplus fish will be used to establish new populations of westslope cutthroat trout in the Upper Missouri Basin in 2006.

Annual monitoring and maintenance of the project area and fish populations identified in 2005 suggested that a second fish barrier should be installed for several reasons:

- Existing barrier is aging and there is concern that a high flow event will damage the structure;
- Location of barrier adjacent to road has invited inadvertent use by the public which is contributing to loss of function; and
- Structural damage would compromise 12 years of maintenance work to retain separation of fish populations.

Project Goal: Ensure continued success of the Whites Gulch Reclamation Project which includes separation of native and non-native fish populations through constructed barriers.

Objective 1: Barrier should be cost effective, durable, and low maintenance.

Objective 2: Barrier should be less visible to the public to prevent inadvertent damage.

Responsible Organizations: Broadwater Conservation District, DFWP, and Helena National Forest.

Location: Whites Gulch drainage in the Big Belt Mountains, about 23 miles northeast of Townsend, on U.S. Forest Service lands, in T10N, R2E, Section 16 (SW1/4).

Duration: Three weeks.